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ABSTRACT

A growing number of schools and institutions in North America have begun offering training in high risk activities such as high element rope courses, rock climbing, white water kayaking and canoeing, and scuba diving in conjunction with their regular physical education activity programs. High risk activities are those activities which occur in or create an environment which is hostile to the participant. The environment is hostile in the restricted sense that it is not supportive of human life so that, without proper equipment, technique, and training, the participant could not survive exposure to it. Related literature suggests that, while modern industrial society generally rejects the physical sort of risk taking evidenced in high risk activities, in the end social conditions and dominant values of society create a social milieu in which high risk activities have a meaningful and useful role. The literature explains risk taking in terms of a search for "eustress" (pleasant stress). Nietzsche's categories of Dionysianism and Apollonianism are employed to explain risk takers' behavior, and it is suggested that risk taking activities actually produce a catharsis for participants. It is concluded that a safely conducted, low actual risk, high risk activity program could serve as an important component in a physical education program. (JMK)

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The Educational Value of High Risk Activities in the Physical Education Program: A Social Philosophical Perspective *

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Running Head: High Risk Activities in Physical Education Programs

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Abstract

With the increasing number of courses being offered in high risk activities at schools and institutions in North America, it is of interest to consider the educational value of these activities in physical education settings. A definition of high risk activity is proposed to specify the topic and clarify prevalent misconceptions about risk in high risk settings. Subsequently a review of three major works in the literature situates high risk activity in contemporary society, and forms the social philosophical perspctive that is the focus of the paper. Finally, in light of preceeding discussion, the educational value of high risk activities in physical education programs is presented. It is argued that the social conditions and dominant values of contemporary western culture are such that they create a social milieu in which high risk activities have a meaningful social and educational role.

The Educational Value of High Risk Activities in the Physical Education Program: A Social Philosophical Perspective

As evidenced over the last fifteen years, a growing number of schools and institutions in North America have begun offering training in high risk activities such as high element ropes courses, rock climbing, white water kayaking and canoeing, and scuba diving in conjunction with their regular physical education activity programs. Donnelly (1977) has documented a trend for offering courses in high risk activities, and there is additional evidence to support his claim.[1] Whatever may be the reasons for this development, as these activities are being used ostensibly for educational purposes, and as there is yet no final word on their educational value, it is interesting to consider some of the issues concerning their value in present-day physical education settings. In particular, social philosophical issues are a fertile area on which to focus as there is a growing body of literature in sociology and social philosophy that relates to risk taking, and little as yet has been done with it concerning the educational value of high risk activities. Accordingly, this paper focuses on precisely these issues, formulating a social philosophical perspective on the educational value of high risk activities in the physical education program. It proceeds in three general steps.

First, a definition of high risk activity is proposed based on common elements between these various activities. This is a necessary first step to qualify the kind of activity and therefore the kind of educational experience in question. Second, drawing on this definition and on the literature, high risk activity is situated in the social fabric of modern industrial society, a step which establishes the social philosophical perspective that is the focus of the paper. Finally, in this context an ac-

count is offered of the role and value of high risk activities in contemporary physical education programs. Special attention is given to the nature of physical education and high risk activity, and to apparent conflicts between them.

Clarification of the Focus

At the outset, several additional comments are warranted to clarify the focus of the paper. It is noteworthy that, when viewed in the context of physical education, high risk activities are presently considered to be a subset of a broad program category in the field called adventure education. There is a considerable array of programs which fall into this category including outdoors pursuits programs as well as outdoor adventure, outdoor challenge, and wilderness sports programs. In some respects, therefore, by focusing on high risk activities this paper invites criticism because it overlooks the more significant implications of the adventure movement in physical education and the ties between high risk activities instruction and this movement. In addition, the very use of the term "high risk activity" is itself somewhat controversial in present context as a number of people in the field now prefer the terms "adventure" or "challenge" in place of "risk".

In defense of the paper's topic, however, I have three general comments. First, it seems to me that risk taking itself is a cornerstone of the adventure education enterprise. Although not all adventure education utilizes high risk activities, risk taking in one form or another remains the essential form of and ingredient for adventure. If you will, taking risks is what makes adventures adventurous, and high risk implies high adventure. A study of risk taking in high risk activity, therefore, is a

reasonable way to get at this essential aspect of adventure education. Second, just as adventure is not unrelated to risk taking, so too challenge is not unrelated to risk taking. The concept of challenge, it can be shown, implies risk, for to speak of challenge is only to speak of risk in a constructive and positive way. Challenge, in its actualized form in physical activity, is an intentional affirmation of risk in doing or attempting to do something difficult. Challenge, in short, has positive connotations, whereas risk has negative connotations, and this relates to my third point.

If risk taking may be understood as a cornerstone of adventure education, it is also its chief stumbling block. In the present social climate, legal and otherwise, it is the part which is hardest to justify. Risk taking, especially in the form of high risk activities, is yet a social black sheep. Thus, if one could conceptually penetrate the educational value of risk in high risk activities, one would be cracking the most difficult part of the value structure of adventure education. And if at the same time one could demystify to some extent the confusion the general public has about how risky high risk activities in adventure programs really are, then it seems to me that one would be doing a service to all parties concerned, adventure education programmer, consumer, and general public alike. For these additional reasons, risk taking and high risk activity seem a decisive area upon which to focus.

Definition of High Risk Activity

Turning to the first task of the paper, it is noteworthy that defining high risk activity is not as straightforward as it might at first

appear. One of the more recalcitrant problems in offering such a definition is the issue of risk itself. Risk comes in many shapes and forms, and high risk, therefore, is an illusive concept. A brief story serves as a case in point.

Everyone has a favorite parachuting story. In this one, a first jump student has experienced a total malfunction on his main parachute, has, as instructed, pulled his reserve parachute, and now experienced a total malfunction on it as well. In a panic he looks at the ground just in time to see a flash of light and a man rising up towards him trailing smoke and flames. It is clear from their trajectories that they will meet. The parachutist, elated, says to himself, "My Lord. This is a miracle! It's my last chance!". As the fellow draws near, the parachutist yells down to him, "Buddy! I need help! Do you know anything about parachutes?". And from below he hears the fellow's voice, yelling back, "Noooo. Do you know anything about Coleman stoves?".

What the story dramatizes is that there are many forms and degrees of risk. Clearly both persons in the episode experience a form of risk that might be called physical risk or danger. Equally clearly, however, prior to their respective difficulties almost no one would have claimed that lighting the Coleman stove ranked in risk with jumping from the airplane. Lighting stoves may be risky, but parachuting is riskier. Or is it? By what criteria do we judge these things? As well, the physical form of risk demonstrated here misses the kind of emotional and psychological risk that most of us commonly experience everyday as persons who have self-images and self-expectations and resultant psychological vulnerability.

Although psychological risk may not be as final an issue as physical risk, it clearly is an issue in human affairs and has a role in risk taking. Thus, it is apparent that risk and, as a result, high risk are complex phenomena in human life and ones that are conceptually untidy, a fact which makes defining high risk activity an engaging task.

Having spent considerable time studying high risk activities, however, I have arrived at the following humble definition. High risk activities, one might argue, are those activities which occur in or create an environment which is hostile to the participant. The environment is hostile in the restricted sense that it is not supportive of human life so that without proper equipment, technique, and training, the participant could not survive exposure to it. A parachutist in freefall without a parachute, for example, as evidenced in the foregoing story would be in rather bad shape as would a rock climber on a sheer face with no technique (and no rope). Through skilled and knowledgeable use of equipment and techniques, and through constant vigilance, the participant is able to in some measure control the environment's hostility and attempt a preconceived purpose in its midst. The environment, of course, remains hostile so that any significant loss of control is certain to result in severe injury or demise.

Loss of control, in turn, may occur in four areas: equipment failure, failure of technique, personal failure, or environmental failure. Equipment failure usually occurs as an abuse or misuse of a piece of gear, but may also result from design or manufacturing error. A broken karabiner in rock climbing or a malfunctioning regulator in scuba diving could both result from improper use, maintenance, design, or manufacture, or all four.

Failure of technique, especially established technique, is most common during the growth and development of an activity. For years in parachuting, for example, it was proper technique to deploy the reserve parachute without first jettisoning the malfunctioned main, a technique that cost numerous lives. As well, a person may have learned the wrong technique or simply lack sufficient skill in the technique. Personal failure results as a person's inability to cope with the situation at hand, for whatever reason: fatigue, fear, overconfidence, carelessness, etc. Environmental failure occurs as an unforeseen or unforeseeable event in which some part of the environment acts in such a way as to destroy the person's control. An avalanche or rock slide in rock climbing are good examples as is a sudden gust of wind in hang gliding or parachuting. Most importantly, however, in terms of the potential educational value of high risk activities, the burden remains on the participant in all four of these areas of failure to maintain control and avert the disaster that would result in its absense. Personal control of risk is a prerequisite for high risk activity. As the British poet and rock climber Alvarez (1967) has said, "The fascination for me is keeping the risk in complete control" (p. 205).

High risk activities, therefore, are neither a simple nor a pure form of risk taking. They have little in common with gambling, for example, and even less with simple daredevilry. The latter Alvarez refers to as a form of exhibitionism, "a vulgarity to one's self" (p. 205). Instead, like sport, dance, and other challenging physical activities, high risk activities are skill oriented, and require that participants both learn skills and learn the limits within which they can be performed. Mistakes, of

course, can be more costly in high risk activities than in their low risk counterparts, and this is a notable difference.

Given most people's propensity to err, one might wonder how risky these activities really are. The answer is that they are indeed risky, but not as risky as many think, and in some the risk can be well controlled. Life insurance reports (Metropolitan, 1967, 1970, 1974, 1975) show that people who participate in high risk activities have a higher mortality rate than the norm. Personal testimony about accidents support these statistics. Donnelly (1976), rock climber and sport sociologist, has written, "There cannot be many of us who have been climbing for some time who have not experienced the loss of at least one friend or acquaintance, or who know someone who was injured" (p. 32).[2] A problem with both these kinds of reports, however, is that they are not personally valid. How we do an activity significantly effects its risk. As well, statistical accounts of risk do not capture an activity's actual risk. Case in point: if I were a scuba diver, the (hypothetical) fact that only one diver was eaten by a shark last year would mean little to me if I were presently staring into the toothy end of one. My statistics would be swept away by the "open-ended presence of the shark", if you will. Statistical risk, at best, is only a historical record of mine or another's past performances, at worst, an indiscriminate formula for probability. In neither case can it alter the fact that I must control the situation before me to stave off the actual possibility of my demise. The bottom line is that because high risk activities can be and generally are undertaken in careful control, their actual risk remains quite low, while paradoxically their apparent risk is high. And this is pre-

cisely what confounds the general public. It is characteristic of all high risk activities that their riskiness is highly visible and has a high (life-death) value, but that their actual risk, when properly conducted, is comparatively low, that is, they have a high perceived risk and a low actual risk. And this is one very good reason why these activities can be useful in education. Given that in some such as high element ropes courses and top rope rock climbing the actual risk can effectively be reduced to zero, a remarkable setting is achieved in which one can engage tremendous apparent risk and learn in its context to trust other people, oneself, one's equipment and skill, with no actual risk. The point is not that the person is somehow tricked into perceiving risk where there is none. The risk is in fact real: the environment is hostile. It is rather that the person is placed in a difficult situation whose actual risk depends to some extent on his or her own actions as well as on those of others and on the integrity of equipment, skills, and technique; and this situation has immeasurable potential for self-discovery, self-realization, and personal growth. I will return to this.

Social Perspective

The second step of the paper is equally as engaging as the first. Related literature in the field suggests that while modern industrial society as a whole rejects the physical sort of risk taking evidenced in high risk activities, in the end the social conditions and dominant values of society are such that they create a social milieu in which high risk activities actually have a meaningful and useful role. By briefly reviewing several of the more penetrating analyses of risk activity I will at-

tempt to lay bare these issues and get at the value of high risk activity in the contemporary social setting. This analysis will set the stage for the final discussion of their educational value in section three.

In her landmark paper entitled, "The Eudaemonists", Jessie Bernard (1968) employs Nietzsche's categories of Dionysianism and Apollonianism to catalogue two aspects of human nature, the one irrational, lusting for life, conquest, drunkenness, and mystic ecstasy, the other rational, seeking peace, harmony, balance, and self-restraint. Dionysus, you will recall, was the Greek god of chaos and destruction and also fertility and productivity, celebrated in Thrace and Phrygia in orgiastic rites and drunken frenzy. Apollo was the more modestly celebrated god of light, beauty, and harmony. For Nietzsche, humanity's greatest achievements were realized in the opposing yet self-enhancing interaction of these two great forces in our nature, as evidenced in the merger of the Apollonian and Dionysian spirit in Greek tragedy.[3] Although Bernard to some extent misunderstands this fact and presents Nietzsche as a simple advocate of Dionysianism, her utilization of Nietzsche's categories is accurate and her message is telling. She allies Dionysianism with what she calls eudaemonism, a term I take to mean a person's searching for pleasure in the form of eustress or pleasant stress, as that associated with excitement, adventure, and thrilling experience. High risk activities are in her view eudaemonistic, eustressful, and Dionysian. Apollonianism, by implication, is allied with dys-stress or unpleasant stress as that associated with duties and responsibilities, or as Bernard suggests "with the Protestant Ethic, Puritanism, with bluenoses" (p. 8).

The crux of her paper is that contemporary society is Apollonian in nature and discourages overt Dionysian expression, thereby discouraging eudaemonism and the pursuit of eustress. According to Bernard, this is highly problematic as the Dionysian is in fact a part of our nature and cannot long be kept at bay by the Apollonian. Quoting from Crane Brinton, she writes, "... the brute is life and cannot long be restrained" (p. 10). The concern becomes, therefore, to find appropriate outlets in modern society for eudaemonism and the Dionysian spirit. Again she writes, "It is not a matter of eliminating eudaemonism but one of finding suitable expressions for it. Even Christianity, which Nietzsche hated because it seemed to him to repress eustress-seeking, found acceptable ways for eudaemonistic expression in crusades, revivals, and cults" (p. 10). Thus, in the final analysis, given that society is manifestly Apollonian and that eudaemonistic, Dionysian expression is inevitable, the real issue becomes to find and develop forms of eudaemonsitic expression that are suitable. Although Bernard does not offer specific guidelines, it is clear in her analysis that she is concerned about the possibility of eudaemonistic expression through war and violence and prefers more peaceful and constructive forms. One would certainly not be out of order in this context to argue that high risk activities are potentially one such form.

Echoing Bernard's position, Elias and Dunning (1970) in a paper entitled, "The Quest for Excitement in Unexciting Societies", identify what they call a "mimetic" class of leisure activities which they feel have similar functions in contemporary society as the Dionysian festivals of the Greeks, providing spontaneous and elementary excitement in juxtaposition to a dominant social code of moral and emotional restraint. Exciting

leisure activities, the authors warn, can only be understood in terms of this generalized, present-day societal restraint of excitement.

Their position has remarkable parallels with Bernard's although their concept of "mimetic" activities gives their analysis a slightly different focus and tone. "Mimetic" defines that class of leisure activities which within their own sphere arouse emotions experienced in other spheres of life, for example, fear, compassion, and jealousy, but do so in a manner which is not seriously perturbing or dangerous as would be the case in real life. Included in this class is a large spectrum of leisure activities ranging from theatre to motion pictures to sports events. The mimetic aspect of these activities, we are told, is not that they imitate or are thus representational of events in real life, but rather that the emotions aroused by them are related to those experienced in "real life" situations, with the distinction that they are enjoyed. As the authors say, "(they are) transposed in a different key and blended with a 'kind of delight'" (p. 41). Significantly, Elias and Dunning describe the pursuit of such activities not as a quest for release from emotional tension but rather as a quest for a specific kind of tension, an exciting kind connected with fear, sadness, and other emotions we usually try to avoid.

The result of the quest is what they call a protracted climax; rising tension gives way through a climax to a form of tension-resolution. The pleasure associated with this event makes it a perfect candidate for Aristotelian catharsis, a fact which does not go unnoticed by the authors. Their concluding argument is that the cathartic effect of mimetic activities gives them a functional role in the maintenance of health in the social

order. They write, "(The) function (of these) activities is not simply, as is often believed, a liberation from tension, but the restoration of that measure of tension which is an essential ingredient of mental health. The essential character of their cathartic effect is the restoration of a normal mental 'tonus' through a temporary and transient upsurge of pleasurable excitement" (p. 50). In present context, it would seem reasonable to argue that high risk activities are a mimetic form, possessing and offering some of the qualities outlined here. In the unexciting social fabric of contemporary society, they offer exciting possibilities.

In a slightly different vein, it is striking to note that although he argued a position which is to some extent in conflict with these I have presented, Roger Caillois (1961), in his monumental book, Man, Play, and Games, himself presented evidence which supports their view. Utilizing a four category scheme for classifying play and games, Caillois distinguished between "primitive" societies which he called Dionysian and "complex" or "advanced" societies which he characterized as orderly and rational. Dionysian societies he felt were characterized by immitative and vertiginous cultural forms, or what he called mimicry and ilinx. By contrast, advanced societies were characterized by competitive and chance-oriented cultural forms or what he called agon and alea. He writes, "In the first type there are simulation and vertigo or pantomime and ecstasy which assure the intensity and, as a consequence, the cohesion of social life. In the second type, the social nexus consists of compromise, of an implied reckoning between heredity, which is a kind of chance, and capacity, which presupposes evaluation and competition" (p. 87).

High risk activities in his scheme fall distinctly into the category of ilinx or vertigo types of activities. Ilinx is Greek for whirlpool, and the implication is that risky activities of the high risk sort give the participant a vertiginous or ecstatic sensation. As already presented in Elias and Dunning's work, they also have a mimetic or simulative nature which puts them in the mimicry category as well, and thus seals their position in Caillois' scheme as representative activities of Dionysian societies.

The most telling part of his analysis is his account of the historical transition from primitive to advanced society. The rise of advanced culture, he argues, entails the suppression of simulation and vertigo, on the one hand, and their conversion to new social forms, on the other, both of which lead to the loss of their overt expression and potency in the social order. Subsequently expressed in sublimated and intermittent form they show up in socially deviant behavior or, more acceptably, in games, fiction, and the like, where they attain peripheral significance in culture in relation to aspects of the social condition. Leisure activity, for example, in this context becomes an escape from work and boredom rather than its own expression in the culture. Caillois writes:

> May it be asserted that the transition to civilization as such implies the gradual elimination of the primacy of "ilinx" and "mimicry" in combination, and the substitution and predominance of the "agon-alea" pairing of competition and chance? Whether it be cause or effect, each time that an advanced culture succeeds in emerging from the chaotic original, a palpable repression of the powers of vertigo and

> and simulation is verified. They lose their traditional dominance, are pushed to the periphery of public life, reduced to roles that become more and more modern and intermittent, if not clandestine and guilty, or are relegated to the limited and regulated domain of games and fiction where they afford men the same eternal satisfactions, but in sublimated form, serving merely as an escape from boredom or work and entailing neither madness nor delirium. (p. 97)

What is remarkable about Caillois' account is that it documents precisely the problems which Nietzsche saw, and which Bernard and Elias and Dunning have described, but it does so from the position of the status quo, justifying the loss of potency of simulation and vertigo in modern life as an advancement of society, a step towards civilization, and giving their contemporary expression exactly the meaning that most members in western society already picture they have: escape from boredom and work or social deviancy. Like so many scholars, Caillois has failed the crucial test of evaluating the conceptual and valuative foundations of his own culture, and as a result the development from primitive to advanced society he discovers is only the development of his own modern industrial world. Without taking him to task, however, I think we can agree with his analysis and not commit ourselves to his point of view. Allowing that he has correctly assessed the historical development of modern civilization and the present state of western culture, still gives us room to question (1) whether this is the right course of events and (2) whether contemporary society should not be different from what it is viz., whether there should not be appropriate outlets for Dionysian expression. These are real issues, and we fundamentally miss the point if we do not address them.

Finally, it is noteworthy that this latter fact was not lost on a German educator who as a Jew in exile in Britain during World War II started a school in Scotland which incorporated program components he hoped would answer some of the shortcomings he saw in contemporary life. The school was called Gordonstoun, and the man was Kurt Hahn, the founder of Outward Bound, and in some respects therefore the originator of what we know today as outdoor and adventure education. Hahn (Note 1) saw modern society as suffering three social ills, or what he called decays: "the decay of adventure and enterprise; the decay of skill and care; and the decay of compassion and charity" (p. 9). The youth of the day were not immune to these decays and neither he argued, were the educational institutions which schooled them. In a talk presented in 1949 (Hahn, Note 2) he stated, "The educational system of this country has not accepted the responsibility of finding the antidote against a poisonous civilization. This system operates as if the sources of health were still flowing from which our forbears used to benefit in their youth" (p. 6). His solution was to restructure the school curriculum and timetable. A new syllabus (Hahn, Note 2) was designed to have four essential parts. One of these parts which he called expedition training was to culminate in an expedition test. The latter, Hahn stipulated, was to be undertaken only after the student gained some familiarity with the history and nature of the area, and significantly, if at all possible, was to contain an element of danger. Present-day Outward Bound programs commonly use activities such as white water canoeing and kayaking, mountaineering, and rock climbing to satisfy this latter criterium, and all of these, of course, are high risk activities.

It is my present opinion that Kurt Hahn was to some degree correct, if somewhat strong, in his assessment of modern industrial society, an opinion supported by the work of the authors reviewed, and that even-though one may rightfully question some of his curriculum, his use of danger in expedition training does in fact hold antidotal promise for some people and perhaps for some of the ills of contemporary life. His is one framework, at least, in which high risk activities appear very clearly to have educational value. Having introduced the early master of the adventure education trade, it is to this final topic, the educational value of high risk activities, that I would now like to turn.

Educational Value of High Risk Activities

Educational value is a concept nearly as untidy as high risk. Without belaboring the issues, I would like to suggest simply that as education is generally understood as the process of acquiring or imparting knowledge, skill or understanding, something which has educational value is by implication something which either contributes to the quality of this process or to the quality of its product, the knowledge, skill, or understanding generated, or both. Thus, the task of deciding educational value is the dual task of deciding what is good educational process, on the one hand, and good educational product, on the other. This fact, in combination with the distinctive nature of high risk activities, raises some interesting considerations. With high risk activities, not only is process often considered their most important product, but, as it turns out, their educational process itself is vulnerable and somewhat paradoxical in the physical education setting. As well, as I hope is apparent

by now, their social context is a paramount consideration in their educational value. And finally, what they cannot do that is educationally valuable is in many respects as important as what they can do. I will briefly address each of these in order.

As indicated in section one, high risk activities are a good vehicle for self-discovery, self-realization, and personal growth. The high apparent risk and low actual risk that can be achieved in certain of the activities is a pregnant setting for taking the kind of emotional and psychological risks that are necessary for self-discovery and growth. This context when properly engaged enhances learning and develops trust and self-understanding. This I think is fairly self-evident, and because it has already been discussed elsewhere, does not warrant further comment.[4] The interesting thing here is that these terms all refer to process. Self-discovery, self-realization, and personal growth are all educational processes. One discovers, realizes, grows. Admittedly, we often talk about self-knowledge in the context of high risk activity, a fact which seems to connote product, but even here the kind of knowledge we mean usually relates in part to process, to our knowing how to do things or knowing how we perform in certain kinds of situations. The educational orientation of high risk activities, it can therefore be argued, is primarily to process and as a result process is their chief educational end. As stated earlier, process is their most important product.

As a further distinction, it is significant that their emphasis is on the learning rather than on the imparting side of the educational process, that is they fit into the category of experiential education rather than into that of pure skill or pure factual education. This is seen in two dimen-

sions. For one the educational processes of self-discovery, self-realization, and personal growth already noted are personal processes that cannot be imparted but must be gained through actual, individual experience. Second, even the skills that are required in high risk activities cannot be imparted in the same sense that they are in low risk activities. At some point a person must abandon training and either sink or swim, and for this reason the entire learning process in high risk activities is geared towards experiential learning so the person is prepared through experience to handle the actual risk that he or she will one day confront. This is not to say that skills are not imparted during training for high risk activities, but rather that the emphasis during skills training is on acquiring experience plus skill, and not just skill alone. Given this and the additional fact that physical education programs themselves by design are generally dedicated to the imparting of knowledge, skills, and understanding, it is apparent that the educational process intrinsically manifested in high risk activities is to some extent vulnerable and paradoxical in the physical education setting.

There is another, more important side to this. In Jessie Bernard's view, high risk activities are distinctly eustressful and are thus an outlet for Dionysian self-expression. By contrast, physical education programs are in many respects the epitomy of the Apollonian. We quantify, organize, regulate bringing order and form to our teaching and training. Could it be any clearer that a potential conflict of interest exists? It is an ongoing subject of debate in some sectors of physical education whether our programs really build character or whether the people who frequent them arrive with the character we think we build. In the case of

high risk activities, the discussion is clear. The people who seek out these activities do so because they like them: they are eustress-seekers. And therefore of this we can be certain: if we organize and regulate these activities in the fashion that we run the rest of our programs, we will lose the people who want them and lose the opportunity for an important social service. As Bernard (1968) has noted, "... the brute is life and cannot long be restrained" (p. 10). They will simply go elsewhere.

Given the present social climate of the modern world, I think physical education programs have a right to and can offer such activities. The evidence in the literature is convincing. In an overly organized, rationalized, and therefore unexciting world, constructive opportunities for excitement and eustressful self-expression should be provided, and high risk activities constitute one such opportunity. The issue is not so much whether to provide them, I think, as how. The crux of the issue is the context and spirit in which they must be offered in order for them to be educationally valuable and worthwhile in contemporary social settings. |← As Elias and Dunning (1970) have so brilliantly shown, it is the emotional context of mimetic activities which determines their social value. This context, it can be shown, also determines their educational value. It is the intrinsic learning process of catharsis which engenders the learning processes of self-encounter, self-realization, and personal growth, described earlier. Catharsis, in turn, achieves value only in the emotions that get resolved. Thus, the emotional context of mimetic activities is seen to be critical to their educational process and value. Signi-

ficantly, it is also fragile. Kurt Hahn took great pains to insure that his students faced challenge with support; experienced danger with trust. His athletic activities were designed to be within reach of untrained students yet implemented so as to help all students reach standards good enough to yield self-respect. Clearly much of what we call physical education today does not share this concern. Yet the negative emotional potential of high risk activities is such that we must share it or really not bother to offer these activities at all. What is fascinating about Kurt Hahn's approach is that it balances the educator's Apollonian concern for order with the Dionysian quest for eustressful self-expression, mirroring Nietzsche's prescription for tragedy. It brings order but it also invokes chaos. To the extent that Nietzsche saw the opposing yet self-enhancing interaction of these two forces in our nature as the source of humanity's greatest achievements, it would appear that Hahn's approach is in good company.

Finally, having accounted for some of what these activities can do, let me briefly mention some of what they cannot. Like many things, high risk activities are not a panacea. They cannot, for example, transcend issues of race, class, and gender. They do not assure compassion and understanding, sisterhood or brotherhood. They can never solve the problems of the inner city. Yet all of these are claims I have heard in one form or another. The lessons they teach to some extent do not generalize. For example, the short exposures to physical challenge they afford do little to prepare for the protracted exposures to stress more typical of working life. The skills they offer are dubious. Knowing how to scale mountains or dive beneath the sea may or may not have relevance in later life, but for most probably will not. Their chief educational end of self-realiza-

tion and growth is itself not guaranteed. These are personal events which require personal risk, effort, and understanding, and no activity however well controlled can guarantee this process. In the end, it is not even clear that they are a desirable form of activity for all persons. Some, who are not prone to eustress-seeking, may find their context destructive and emotionally damaging rather than constructive and exhilarating. Not all persons should be expected to participate in high risk activities, and certainly not at the same level or with the same intensity.

Despite these shortcomings, however, I remain a proponent of high risk activities. Given that human nature is two sided, Dionysian and Apollonian, and that contemporary society is manifestly Apollonian as Bernard (1968) has suggested, it is important that appropriate outlets are found and maintained for Dionysian self-expression. That vertigo and mimicry have lost their potency in modern civilization, as Caillois (1961) has argued, again supports this view. Self-expressive forms that enable personal restoration of the potency of vertigo and mimicry in human life become significant precisely to the extent that their cultural-expressive forms have lost potency and have been replaced by forms manifesting competition and chance. Rather than serving as an escape from work and boredom in the social sphere, the role of vertigo activities like high risk activities is thus seen to be that of restoring a proper psychological balance in human life at the personal level, or, as Elias and Dunning (1970) have noted, of restoring a proper psychological tension viz., mental tonus, in the individual. From an educational standpoint, this evidence coupled with the possibility for personal growth previously dis-

cussed argues for offering risky activities in physical education programs as a social service as well as an educational device. Probably the discussion should not even stop here, however, as physical education generally is plagued by what might be called dys-stress or a lack of adventure and excitement, this social service becomes an internal affair of physical education itself. The following statement Bernard makes about education is equally true of physical education. She writes, "It is alleged that total lack of eustress in schoolwork contributes to dropouts. Pupils are bored, suffer dys-stress. If learning can be made exciting, it may be more appealing to eustress-seekers" (p. 9). And one might add that good learning should be exciting to all students.

In conclusion, therefore, it would appear that a safely conducted, low actual risk, high risk activity program could serve as an important component in a physical education program. Accomplished in the spirit described by Kurt Hahn, the spirit of challenge, trust, and adventure, high risk activities can be a powerful and positive educational tool bringing excitement and adventure into a physical education curriculum as well as promoting personal growth and development. Perhaps, in the end, the greatest value of high risk activities is in what they can teach us about how to design and instruct the other parts of our physical education programs, as well as in what they can contribute to an outdoors program.

Reference Notes

1. Hahn, K. Addresses by Kurt Hahn. Gordonstoun School Calender, 1961, 9.

2. Hahn, K. The loyalties by which we live. Address given at Conference on Rural Life at Home and Overseas, held under the auspices of the Church Missionary Society at High Leigh, Hoddeson, Herts., January 13, 1949. Printed in report of the conference under the title, The science of relationships.

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Footnotes

[1]As Donnelly (1977) notes in his paper, it is difficult to document the extent to which courses in high risk activities are actually being offered, as few figures are presently available. Additional evidence that he is correct in his claim, however, is that continued personal observation and testimony by physical educators since the publication of his paper confirm that more courses and programs are being offered. Lacking more refined data, further discussion of actual numbers and kinds of courses remains purely conjectural. At the Houston conference of A.S.H.P.E.R.D. held in April, 1982, the Council on Outdoor Education announced plans to conduct a study of university and college outdoor education and adventure programs. The study is badly needed, and its results will be eagerly awaited.

[2]Donnelly (1977) has a good discussion of accident statistics concerning high risk activities (pp. 109-111). The discussion in his 'Outsiders' article (Donnelly, 1976) is pertinent as well.

[3]In addition to my own reading of Nietzsche, the views that I report here are from: Pfeffer, R. Nietzsche: disciple of dionysus. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1972.

[4]A series of papers relating to self-realization, personal growth, and the educational value of high risk activities were presented together in: Leisure today: high adventure, leisure pursuits, and risk education. Journal of Physical Education and Recreation, 1978, April, 25-56.